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RUEH DK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1791
RUEH KM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2212
RUEH NR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4643
RUEA IIA/CIA WASHDC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1298
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000493

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. DIPLOMATS AND STAFF DETAINED BY ZIM SECURITY FORCES

Classified By: Ambassador James McGee for reason 1.4(d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On June 5, five U.S. diplomats and two locally employed staff (LES), accompanied at times by British diplomats, were detained, harassed, and threatened by government security forces, military, police, and "war veterans" during a pre-election assessment trip in Mashonaland Central Province. Two vehicles carrying Mission staff were detained for more than five hours by police after having their tires deflated and/or other measures taken to prohibit movement. During the day-long incident, the lives of the travelers were threatened. All Embassy staff were ultimately released at the behest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), following intervention by the Ambassador with the MFA and Gideon Gono, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. Mission is closely monitoring the impact of this incident on the local community that was visited (septel) and is using public and private diplomatic tools to refute regime propaganda blaming the diplomats and to condemn the Government of Zimbabwe's illegal actions. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On the morning of June 5 at approximately 0800, two vehicles carrying U.S. diplomats and local Mission staff and accompanied by an additional vehicle from the British Embassy carrying four UK diplomats (the British DAO and three visiting diplomats from the UK Ministry of Defense), drove approximately 80km north of Harare to Bindura in Mashonaland Central Province to assess the electoral environment and violence in the area in the run-up to the June 27 presidential run-off. The first vehicle (LES vehicle) was carrying a local employee in USAID's Democracy and Governance office (DG), a Mission driver familiar with the area, a local stringer for the Voice of America, and two Mission contacts: a staff member from the NGO Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition and a member of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) from Bindura. The second vehicle (DATT vehicle) was driven by the Mission Defense Attache (DATT) and carried two poloffs and a Zimbabwean Regional Security Office (RSO) employee. In Bindura the convoy stopped at two homes of local MDC leaders who were housing a number of farm workers and their families who had been displaced after ZANU-PF

members burned down their residences in neighboring wards (septel).

13. (SBU) After departing the second home at approximately 1015, Mission staff were moving toward their vehicles in preparation for travel to the Bindura police station when they were accosted by a truckload of ten police wearing riot gear and armed with wooden or plastic beating batons and an individual believed to be a plainclothes police intelligence officer (PISI). The senior U.S. officer on the trip, the DATT, was informed by the police that they had not received notice of the trip and demanded to see proof of permission from the MFA. As the individuals in the UK vehicle were not in possession of a copy of a diplomatic note noticing their travel, the DATT suggested that the British leave the area. They immediately did so. The DATT produced a copy of the U.S. Mission diplomatic note, dated June 4, informing the MFA of the planned travel, and explained to the PISI officer that under the Vienna Convention the Mission was not required to seek MFA permission to travel. Nevertheless, as a courtesy and as routinely requested by the MFA, the Embassy had notified the MFA of the intended travel to Bindura. The police rejected the DATT's explanation and demanded that both cars of Mission staff report to the local police station immediately. After consulting with the Ambassador in Harare by mobile phone, the DATT stated Embassy members would not go to the police station where their safety could not be guaranteed. Mission staff then returned to their cars, intending to return to Harare at once.

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14. (SBU) As the Mission convoy drove south at approximately 1115 with the LES car in the lead and the DATT car following, it was followed by two white trucks, one carrying riot police and the other carrying the PISI officer. Believing that the police were only escorting the convoy out of Bindura, the Mission convoy drove on. Shortly thereafter, the lead police truck began honking, flashing its lights and swerving across the road in an attempt to compel the Mission convoy to stop. When the convoy did not comply, one police truck sped past the two Mission vehicles and proceeded to veer in front of the LES car, forcing the convoy to stop and blocking further southern movement. A truck carrying the PISI agent stopped directly behind the DATT car, blocking any reverse. Fearing for the safety of the Zimbabwean nationals in the LES car, the DATT radioed the driver of the LES car to drive out of the roadblock if possible. As the LES car began to u-turn, the PISI officer ordered the police to deflate the tires of the DATT car. Hearing this, the DATT backed his car into the police intelligence truck to deflect the police advance. The LES drove north, while the DATT car proceeded south around the police truck.

15. (SBU) For approximately the next 15km, one truck carrying the PISI officer and four riot police pursued the AmCit diplomatic vehicle at high speed. The police truck swerved repeatedly to either side of the road trying unsuccessfully to force the car to stop. As the two vehicles approached an established roadblock in Mazwe (approximately 40km from Harare), the police vehicle began honking repeatedly and police on the ground quickly placed a metal strip with spikes protruding from it across the road in order to force the DATT car to stop. After the DATT stopped his vehicle, riot police, whose truck had arrived on the scene, surrounded the vehicle. As a police officer pointed a rifle at the car, other police attempted to open the (locked) doors to the vehicle, banged on the closed windows and demanded that the diplomats get out. The officer in charge then grabbed the rifle, attempted to cock it, pointed it at the tires, and ordered the tires to be deflated. The PISI officer and riot police, with pocket knives or other sharp objects, completely deflated all four tires on the Mission vehicle and demanded again that the diplomats exit the vehicle to go to the police station. The diplomats, through the DATT, again refused and cited the Vienna Convention.

(NOTE: Other police officers held unloaded pistols at various points throughout the day. END NOTE.)

¶6. (SBU) During subsequent hours, the detained Mission staff remained in the vehicle and refused to exit, open their windows more than a crack, or hand over identity cards, though they did pass road maps and a camera (observed by one of the police officers) out the window upon request. The diplomats showed their identity cards to the security forces through the glass windows and the information was recorded by multiple persons. Throughout the day, the roadblock was visited by a number of individuals, including police, military, intelligence officers, war veterans, and many curious local citizens. At one point the Governor of Mashonaland Central arrived to further chastise the Mission staff for being in what the governor called "my province without permission." The size of the crowd ranged from 20 to ¶60. Police appeared to be nominally in charge, but everyone, including youth and war veterans, were given free rein to walk around and harass the diplomats. Notably, when one group of war veterans attempted to pull on the car door handles and bang on the windows, threatening the lives of the detained Mission staff (stating that they would "get you out and burn you, light your car on fire and burn you to death"), the senior police officer on the scene only gently admonished them to back away from the vehicle and allowed them to resume their harassment moments later. While some threats and

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taunts were directed at the Americans inside the vehicle, most were aimed at the LES who the crowd appeared to consider a traitor because of his association with Americans.

¶7. (SBU) The Embassy was in constant contact with the detained diplomats by mobile phone. Shortly after the detention at the Mazowe roadblock, the Ambassador dispatched the Regional Security Officer (RSO), a DAO member, and an LES from Harare to Bindura to assist. They arrived approximately one and a half hours after the initial detention. Upon arrival, police immediately surrounded their vehicle with spike strips, blocking further movement. When the RSO and LES alighted from the car, they were harassed by some of the crowd, who shoved them, yelled at them, and stripped them of their radios and satellite telephone. While the RSO was made to remain near his vehicle an estimated 100 yards from the DATT vehicle, the LES was taken next to the windows of the disabled car and interrogated about the identities of the diplomats inside and the purpose of their visit. Despite attempting to cooperate with agents, the LES was punched repeatedly in the stomach by PISI and CIO agents and threatened to be "permanently" thrown into a nearby ditch before being returned to his vehicle. The LES security officer in the disabled vehicle was repeatedly threatened and taunted and told to get out of the vehicle, despite his previous 22 years as a police officer; the DATT insisted he stay inside. Both LES staff (in the DATT vehicle and with the RSO) reported that they did their best to deflect the interrogation and any escalation of violence.

¶8. (SBU) The RSO and DAO staffer made repeated attempts to talk to the security officials and were ultimately successful in establishing a civil dialogue with them, which facilitated the de-escalation of what was an extremely tense situation. Toward the end of the detention, a reporter and a photographer from the government newspaper The Herald arrived and proceeded to take numerous pictures of the vehicles and diplomats, often focusing on the RSO and DAO staffer who were talking with police. A police photographer also took numerous pictures of the occupants of the DATT vehicle and their identity cards. Late in the day the British, having gotten lost trying to return to Harare, arrived and were also stopped; they were allowed to leave their car. Police praised the British for having stopped, unlike the Americans, and accused the Americans of having ignored police orders, resulting in their detention.

¶9. (SBU) Around 1500 the Ambassador received a call from the MFA that it was sending personnel to the scene to resolve the situation and let the detained individuals leave. Late in the day, when it appeared permission to leave would be granted, the Ambassador sent the acting GSO with support staff to the area to attend to the DATT car. The GSO staff arrived, inflated the tires on the DATT car and then were allowed to leave the scene.

¶10. (SBU) At about 1600, the chief of protocol from the MFA and another unidentified MFA officer arrived. The MFA officials proceeded to speak at length with the various security officers and Herald reporters present, while war veterans kept their distance and the RSO was told to stay away. The chief of protocol then told the DATT his car had been detained on suspicion of stolen license plates. (NOTE: Media spokesmen later claimed that earlier in Bindura police had intervened with the Embassy vehicles and their occupants to save them from an angry mob. END NOTE.) The MFA officer went on to state that the United States had been in violation of protocol for not giving the MFA additional time to review the diplomatic note announcing travel and insisted in the future that the MFA be given 48 hours notice of official travel more than 40 kilometers from Harare. The MFA

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officials then examined the damage to the police intelligence truck that had occurred in Bindura when the DATT avoided the initial detention. The chief of protocol, whose demeanor had shifted from stern to affable, noted that it was an unfortunate accident and finally, following mobile phone conversations between his colleague and the MFA, released all involved. Both vehicles and all staff immediately departed for Harare and arrived just after 1700.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The GOZ has taken the position that a diplomatic note announcing dates of travel and destination for Embassy Americans traveling more than 40 kilometers from Harare must be delivered to the MFA more than 48 hours in advance of travel. In May 2006, the Embassy sent a diplomatic note to the MFA arguing that this requirement violated Articles 25 and 26 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Nevertheless, we have continued to send notes, although not always 48 hours in advance of travel, as a courtesy.

¶12. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The detention in this instance was not because of a failure of protocol, but was an effort by the GOZ to restrict our movements, as it is restricting movement of NGOs and the MDC, in the run-up to the election. ZANU-PF-GOZ wishes to continue doing its dirty work around the country unencumbered by the watchful eyes of others. END COMMENT.

McGee